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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000214

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV IS ELECTIONS GOI INTERNAL

SUBJECT: PRIMARIES SHAKE UP SHINU, LIKUD; OLPERT TO NAME NEW MINISTERS

REF: TEL AVIV 180

Classified By: Political Counselor Norman Olsen for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (SBU) Summary: Surprise results in the Shinui January 12 primaries for the party's Knesset list have led to a split in the party, with at least six Shinui MKs -- and perhaps party leader Tommy Lapid -- poised to form a new party that could be eligible to take on Shinui's name and its budget. Likud's January 12 primary split up the so-called anti-disengagement rebels, placing three within the top five slots, and the rest in low-ranking positions that all but foreclose their chances, according to current polls, of winning Knesset seats in the March 28 elections. Only one woman, recently resigned Education Minister Limor Livnat, was voted high enough to expect a Knesset seat. In the meantime, the four remaining Likud ministers have reluctantly submitted their letters of resignation, as demanded by Likud Chairman Binyamin Netanyahu. Alternate Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is now poised to appoint ministers during the January 15 Cabinet session to fill at least some of the 12 seats left vacant by the departures of Likud and Labor, and reportedly is planning to replace FM Silvan Shalom with current Justice Minister Tzippi Livni. End Summary.

Shinui Council Vote Causes Split

12. (C) The Shinui Party is on the verge of splitting apart after January 12 primaries in which the 170-member Shinui Council only narrowly returned Tommy Lapid to his leadership position in the party, placed newcomer Ron Levinthal in the second slot over Lapid's confidant, Avraham Poraz, and low-ranked other current MKs, some of whom immediately left the party: Avraham Poraz, Eti Livni, Ilan Shalgi, Chemi Doron, Eliezer Zandberg, Roni Brizon, and Meli Polishook-Bloch. Chemi Doron told Poloff January 13 that he and the other MKs who quit are likely to join with Lapid to form a new party and that if they form a majority of Shinui's 14 MKs, they will be entitled to take the Shinui name and its budget with them. Livni, however, had intimated to Codel Obama January 10 that, given her close relationship with Ehud Olmert (reftel), she would consider jumping to Kadima if she were low-ranked. She said then that she could not predict whether other Shinui MKs would do likewise.

Likud Shows Younger, Male-Dominated Face

13. (C) In another primary upset, the 3,000-member Likud Central Committee, with a 91 percent turnout rate, surprised observers by placing in slots three through five -- right after Netanyahu and Silvan Shalom -- MK Moshe Kahlon, 46, a rebel; MK Gilad Erdan, 36, who had broken with the rebels; and former coalition whip Gideon Sa'ar, 39, a fierce disengagement foe who had turned violently on his former mentor, Ariel Sharon. Newly-resigned Likud ministers Danny Naveh and Limor Livnat took list positions eight and ten, respectively, while the rest of the so-called rebels, including rebel leader Uzi Landau, landed in list positions too low to likely win Knesset seats. Former Education Minister Limor Livnat, with the number 10 slot, became the only woman to receive a realistic place on the list. Polls show that Likud would win only 12-16 Knesset seats if voting were held now. The next woman, rebel Leah Nass, is number 17 on the list. Erdan predicted to Poloff January 13 that Likud will win at least 20 seats during elections.

Tzippi Livni Over Peres for MFA

14. (SBU) Complying with Netanyahu's January 11 instructions, Education Minister Livnat, Health Minister Danny Naveh, and Agriculture Minister Yisrael Katz reluctantly submitted their letters of resignation January 12, thereby entering Likud primaries without the benefit of their ministerial titles. Foreign Minister Shalom was the last holdout, reaching a compromise with Netanyahu to resign one day later. Alternate Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is now poised to nominate new ministers to fill at least some of these four vacancies and the eight left by Labor when they left the government at the end of November. He will reportedly bring his nominations to

a Cabinet vote January 15. While no official announcements have been made, the media reports that Olmert will nominate Justice Minister Tzippi Livni to replace FM Shalom. Kadima members Roni Bar-On, Ze'ev Boim, and Ya'akov Edery, as well as MKs Dalia Yitzik, Chaim Ramon, and Shimon Peres, all three former Labor members who have not yet formally joined Kadima, are likely to get ministries. According to the Basic Laws, the appointment of ministers to vacant portfolios will not require Knesset approval, but the transfer of portfolios from one minister to another will.

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